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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH TGS DEP CHIEF BASBUG FOCUSES ON IRAQ AND CYPRUS

(U) Classified by Ambassador Eric S. Edelman. Reason: 1.5
(b) and (d)

1. (S) Summary: The Ambassador's lengthy (1.5 hours) initial call on the TGS DCHOD, General Basbug, focused primarily on Iraq and Cyprus. On Iraq, Basbug asserted that TGS supports a GOT decision to contribute troops to Iraq, preferably before a new UNSCR is passed, although he worried that media reports of political conditions on the \$8.5 billion US loan program for Turkey might complicate the GOT's deliberations. He expressed understanding why the US would not take significant military action against the PKK/KADEK in northern Iraq now, but suggested a "token" act, e.g., turning over one or two leaders or an air strike, would reinforce what he hoped would be a strong message from both countries that the PKK/KADEK's days in Iraq were numbered. Information that Kurds would make up 50% of Iraq's new defense forces concerned TGS, he said. Basbug worried that the Cyprus issue might complicate Turkey's EU accession ambitions, and suggested that lifting the embargo on northern Cyprus would contribute to a solution. He did not respond to the Ambassador's suggestion to cancel exercises on the island. On other issues, Basbug acknowledged that the Turkish Land Forces' attack helicopter procurement project was "frozen" but the requirement and the program were still valid; TGS J5 would be convening a meeting on the program's fate the following week. He also said he would "study" a proposal to hold the High Level Defense Group in November with an acting ASD if one were offered. End Summary.

US-Turkey: Recovering from March 1 and the HLDG

2. (C) The Ambassador made his initial call on TGS Deputy Chief of Defense General Mehmet Ilker Basbug on October 2. After opening the discussion by contrasting different approaches to international politics (Basbug is a believer in realpolitik), the general raised Iraq. Recalling the reaction to the failed vote to permit US forces to transit Turkey on March 1, Basbug said the media coverage of the vote and statements attributed to senior USG officials "disappointed" the Turkish armed forces whose support for the GOT's position had been clear. He asserted that although the vote had a negative impact on the bilateral mil-mil relationship, it had not damaged it. As a result, he preferred to talk about the need to "improve" the relationship, not to "repair" it. To that end, he noted that a meeting of the High Level Defense Group (HLDG) could be helpful, but he had heard that his counterpart, ASD Crouch would be leaving his position. The Ambassador responded that that US could accept the Turkish dates with the understanding that acting ASD Ricardel would chair our side. It would likely be some time before a permanent successor to Dr. Crouch was in place. Basbug noted that it would be useful to have a meeting this year and requested the US side provide the proposal to convene the HLDG during the week of November 17 as TGS proposed, and he would consider it. (Comment: Septel makes recommendations on how to do this.)

TGS Backs Contribution to Stability Force

3. (C) Regarding Turkey's possible troop contribution to the stability force in Iraq, Basbug confirmed the Ambassador's understanding that TGS supported a contribution as both in Turkey's interest by contributing to Iraq's territorial integrity and by strengthening US-Turkey relations but that the final decision was up to the government and the parliament. Basbug emphasized that Turkey "should not be indifferent" toward developments in Iraq and that while TGS was "quite optimistic" about a positive decision, he was not sure when that would come. Nonetheless, the generals were advising the politicians that it would be "even better" for Turkey if Ankara were to decide before the UN Security Council passes a new resolution.

14. (C) Basbug recalled that in the run-up to the March 1 decision to not approve passage by the 4ID through Turkey, Turkish officials had offered American interlocutors who asked the following advice on Iraq:

-- Iraq's territorial integrity must be preserved. The way to do that was by treating all ethnic groups equally. Not doing so would be "seeding some problems" for the future. Although Basbug understood that relying on the Kurds "in the short term" was expedient, he worried about information he had received that the new Iraqi defense force would number 40,000 by the end of next year with half its members being Kurds. He also had heard that the numbers would swell to 200,000 by the end of 2013, yet Kurds would continue to make up half the force. He thought dissolving the former Iraqi armed forces had been a mistake. The Ambassador said he was unaware of any ethnic quotas in assembling a new national army in Iraq. One key objective in Iraq was to move people toward thinking of themselves first as Iraqis and not as Kurds, Shia, etc.

-- The interim administration of Iraq should be effective. The way to do this was to include individuals who were respected by the Iraqi people. Basbug reiterated this point several times throughout the meeting. Recognizing that Basbug was trying to promote the new Iraqi Turkmen Front leadership, the Ambassador responded that the US was following recent developments within the ITF closely.

15. (C) Turning to the USG's \$8.5 billion loan guarantee program for Turkey, Basbug stated that TGS was concerned that the political conditions in loan agreement could negatively impact on the parliament's consideration of the troop contribution question. The conditions in the agreement about avoiding unilateral action in northern Iraq were "nonsense," and "irrelevant," he said. Currently, there was no reason for Turkey to consider a cross-border operation; in the future there might be. However, there is only one authority in Iraq and that is the US, Basbug declared, and it was unimaginable that Turkey would enter Iraq without consulting with the US first. He accepted the Ambassador's explanation of how the loan agreement simply reflected the law authorizing the credit guarantees which included the condition because of the circumstances last spring when it was adopted. Basbug nevertheless lamented that the language had an impact on public opinion despite the public denials by US representatives.

Need Joint Action Against the PKK/KADEK

16. (S) "Today a very important meeting is occurring," Basbug stated, referring to S/CT Ambassador Cofer Black's meeting with a GOT interagency team (septel). He explained that TGS did not want action against the PKK/KADEK tied to a Turkish troop contribution to Iraq, underlining that Turkey needed action taken against the terrorists regardless of its troop decision. At the same time, the PKK/KADEK issue is a "vital" and "sensitive" issue for Turkey. He said that a day earlier he had told MFA officials that they should try to convince the US to issue a joint declaration. The Ambassador summarized Ambassador Black's approach for Basbug.

17. (S) Basbug agreed that the major objective for the time being should be to convince the PKK/KADEK that its time in northern Iraq is about to end. Both countries' taking a clear and firm position was "more important than physical action for the time being," he said. He agreed with the Ambassador's assessment of the news reports' negative impact and noted that military intelligence suggested the PKK/KADEK leadership had been nervous about what would happen to them when the OIF began, but now they believe they are safe. If the PKK/KADEK membership could be made to believe their future in Iraq is dark, many would take advantage of the Repentance Law.

18. (S) Basbug declared that simply putting the organization on the EU foreign terrorist organizations list would not solve the problem. The public expected action, although he allowed that that could come later. For now, he thought a signal would be important to underscore the seriousness of Turkey's and the US's resolve. For example, if the US were to hand over one or two PKK/KADEK leaders, it would be a "great blow" to the organization. Alternatively, Basbug suggested one or

two aircraft could conduct an air strike against PKK/KADEK locations in the mountains. The point would not be to kill the terrorists, but just to shake them up. Basbug understood that the US did not have any available forces for a major operation against the PKK/KADEK now, but he hoped that would change in the future. He noted that Turkey was always ready to participate in a joint effort, although DAS Pascoe's statement that the US would not want Turkish forces involved puzzled him.

Cyprus: Worried about EU and Resettlement; Mum on Exercises

19. (C) Basbug next turned to Cyprus. He affirmed Turkish armed forces' support for EU membership but worried that the Cyprus issue could be a serious obstacle. The general understood that the status quo could not continue forever and that a solution must be found, but finding one after Cyprus joins the EU would be very difficult. A lasting solution, he thought, must preserve the bi-zonal system because there is currently a lack of confidence between the two communities. He also thought the guarantee powers system should be preserved with some military presence, although "the numbers are not important," he said. He thought the lifting of the trade embargo on northern Cyprus would "help the situation." Although he claimed not to be opposed to the Annan Plan (or any plan) per se, he thought recommendations should be tied to events. He said he agreed with FM Gul that a new approach should be found. The Ambassador responded that the period between the December northern Cypriot elections and Cyprus's May 2004 EU accession would be the best opportunity to reach a settlement. It was clear that the people on both sides want a settlement and that the Annan Plan was the best available for a quick solution. The US had already set aside funds to help deal with the resettlement problem. Basbug picked up on the last point to lament the huge problem resettlement will pose, with 100,000 families moving, costing up to \$5 billion. The Ambassador argued that the price tag may be a bit inflated, and noted that he hoped Special Negotiator Weston would visit Ankara in the near future where this issue could be further explored.

110. (C) The Ambassador asked whether Turkey could follow last year's precedent of canceling its annual fall exercise with Cyprus if the Greek side did the same. Basbug did not respond. (Note: The Ambassador had raised this same subject with DefMin Gonul on October 1. Gonul understood the importance of the issue, but he was not prepared to respond at that time.)

Other issues: Attack Helicopters, EUCOM Visit

111. (C) On other issues, the Ambassador asked Basbug of TGS's attitude toward the long-stalled Land Force's attack helicopter procurement. Basbug said the "project is not dead," at least not yet. "Frozen" (a word PM Erdogan used with a visiting American Turkish Council delegation earlier in the week) was correct at the moment. Basbug emphasized that the requirement and the program were still valid. He recalled two problems with the program: the unit price "is a little high;" and, the lack of agreement on the terms and conditions regarding the mission computer. He said that TGS J5 would be convening a meeting next week on the program after which the Turkish side would inform us of the program's status.

112. (C) The Ambassador recalled that Basbug had received an invitation from EUCOM Deputy Commander Gen Wald. Basbug acknowledged receiving the invitation, but gave no indication of when he would want to take it up.
EDELMAN